Jain Festivals: A Complete Guide to Paryushan and Mahavir Jayanti

Introduction

Jainism, one of the world's oldest religions, emphasizes peace, compassion, and self-discipline. The festivals celebrated by Jains are not merely occasions of joy, but opportunities for deep spiritual reflection, forgiveness, and purification of the soul. Among the many festivals in the Jain calendar, **Paryushan** and **Mahavir Jayanti** stand out as the most important.

In this guide, we'll explore the **meaning, significance, rituals, and values** behind these two sacred Jain festivals — and how their timeless messages continue to inspire peaceful living in the modern world.

What Is Paryushan?

Paryushan Parva is one of the most spiritually significant festivals for the Jain community. The word *Paryushan* is derived from two Sanskrit words: *Pari* (all

around) and *Ushan* (to stay close or to come together). Essentially, Paryushan means **"coming together and staying close to the soul."**

For **Svetambara Jains**, the festival lasts for **8 days**, while **Digambara Jains** observe **Das Lakshana Parva**, which extends for **10 days**. Both traditions share the same spiritual goal — self-purification, reflection, and forgiveness.

The Spiritual Significance of Paryushan

The main purpose of Paryushan is to **introspect, purify the soul, and strengthen one's commitment to the path of non-violence (Ahimsa)** and truth (Satya). During these days, Jains focus on:

- **Fasting and self-discipline** to reduce attachment to worldly pleasures.
- **Reading Jain scriptures** such as the *Kalpa Sutra*, which recounts the life of Lord Mahavira.
- **Pratikraman**, a daily ritual of repentance for one's mistakes and harmful actions.

This festival is a reminder that real growth comes from **self-awareness, humility, and compassion** toward all living beings.

Paryushan Rituals and Observances

1. **Fasting (Upvas):** Many Jains observe fasting during Paryushan — from partial fasting to complete abstinence from food and water.
2. **Pratikraman:** A daily ritual of self-reflection and repentance, performed to acknowledge and correct one's faults.
3. **Scripture Reading:** Monks and nuns deliver discourses from sacred Jain texts to inspire moral living.
4. **Forgiveness Day – Michhami Dukkadam:** The last day of Paryushan is celebrated as **Samvatsari**, the Day of Universal Forgiveness. Jains seek forgiveness from everyone by saying **"Michhami Dukkadam,"** meaning "May all the wrongs I have done to you be forgiven."

This beautiful tradition teaches that **true peace begins with forgiveness** — both towards others and oneself.

Mahavir Jayanti – The Birth Anniversary of Lord Mahavira

While Paryushan is a time of reflection and repentance, **Mahavir Jayanti** is a festival of celebration and inspiration. It marks the **birth of Lord Mahavira**, the 24th and last Tirthankara (spiritual teacher) of Jainism, who was born in **599 BCE in Kundagrama (now in Bihar, India).**

Mahavir Jayanti usually falls in **March or April**, depending on the lunar calendar, and is one of the most joyous days for Jains around the world.

The Life and Teachings of Lord Mahavira

Lord Mahavira's life is a beacon of simplicity, courage, and compassion. He renounced his royal life at the age of 30 to seek spiritual truth. Through years of deep meditation and austerity, he attained **Keval Jnana (omniscience)** and shared his teachings of **Ahimsa (non-violence)**, **Anekantavada (many-sided truth)**, and **Aparigraha (non-possession)**.

His message remains timeless — urging people to live with kindness, respect for all living beings, and freedom from material desires.

How Mahavir Jayanti Is Celebrated

1. **Processions (Rath Yatra):** Colorful processions featuring images of Lord Mahavira are taken out on the streets, accompanied by music, chanting, and spiritual songs.
2. **Temple Rituals:** Jain temples are beautifully decorated, and devotees perform **Abhishek** (ceremonial bathing) of Lord Mahavira's idol with milk, saffron, and water.
3. **Charity and Service:** Followers engage in acts of kindness such as distributing food, donating to animal shelters, and helping those in need.

4. **Discourses and Prayers:** Monks, nuns, and scholars deliver teachings on Lord Mahavira's life, inspiring people to practice non-violence and truth in their daily lives.

The festival serves as a reminder that **true celebration lies in spreading compassion, peace, and moral values**.

The Common Essence of Both Festivals

Although **Paryushan** and **Mahavir Jayanti** differ in tone — one introspective, the other celebratory — both share the **core Jain values** of:

- **Ahimsa (Non-Violence)** – Respecting all forms of life.
- **Satya (Truth)** – Speaking and living truthfully.
- **Aparigraha (Non-Possession)** – Reducing attachment to material things.
- **Forgiveness and Compassion** – Healing relationships and purifying the heart.

In essence, both festivals inspire individuals to **live consciously, act compassionately, and walk the path of inner purity.**

Modern Relevance of Jain Festivals

In today's fast-paced, materialistic world, the teachings behind Paryushan and Mahavir Jayanti are more relevant than ever. They remind us to:

- Slow down and reconnect with our inner selves.
- Forgive and let go of anger and grudges.
- Live sustainably and avoid harm to other beings.
- Cultivate mindfulness, gratitude, and compassion.

These timeless lessons can help create a more peaceful and eco-conscious society.

Conclusion

In a world driven by technology and fast-paced lifestyles, preserving and passing on the rich spiritual values of Jainism to the next generation is essential. **Digital Jain Pathshala** makes this possible by offering **online and offline courses** that make Jain learning engaging, accessible, and meaningful for kids.

Through interactive lessons, stories, and guided teachings, children can understand the core principles of **Ahimsa (non-violence)**, **Satya (truth)**, and **Aparigraha (non-possession)** — helping them grow into compassionate and mindful individuals.

Whether your family lives in India or abroad, Digital Jain Pathshala ensures that Jainism's timeless wisdom is just a click away. **Enroll your child today** and let them begin a lifelong journey of learning, reflection, and spiritual growth — the Jain way.

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